

Bird Flu Fact Sheet

County of San Diego
Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory
Vector Control

What is “bird flu”?

“Bird flu,” also called avian influenza, is an infection in birds caused by certain influenza viruses. Many different types of influenza viruses occur naturally in wild birds. Most do not cause illness. Infrequently, certain bird flu viruses cause illness in birds, and rarely, in other animals and people. The “H5N1 virus” is a type of bird flu virus that appeared in Asia during 2003, and can cause sickness and death in wild and domestic birds, and rarely people.



Does the virus spread easily from birds to humans?

No. Although almost 200 human cases have occurred globally in the current outbreak of H5N1 bird flu, this is a very small number compared to the large number of people that could have gotten sick from this virus. Research has shown that it is very difficult for people to become infected.

Can humans be infected with bird flu viruses?

The risk to people from bird flu is very low. Direct contact with infected poultry or contaminated materials is necessary for human infection. No human cases have occurred from normal contact with wild birds.

Is it safe to eat poultry and poultry products?

YES! Properly cooked poultry and eggs are safe to eat: Cook poultry to 165 degree Fahrenheit and egg yolks until firm.

Is it safe to own birds?

YES, however, proper cleanliness is critical for keeping pets birds and their owner’s safe.

How can birds be protected from the bird flu?

Biosecurity! Biosecurity is the steps taken to protect your birds from diseases. It involves basic practices of isolation of birds, cleanliness, and disease monitoring. Information on biosecurity can be found at www.sdbirdflu.org and click on the biosecurity link.

What are the symptoms of the bird flu in birds?

Illness can range from no symptoms to severe illness and death. Birds can have diarrhea, discharge from nose and eyes, be lethargic, fluffed, or suddenly die. If your bird is ill, see your veterinarian since many other diseases can cause these same symptoms.

How is bird flu spread between birds?

Birds become sick from contact with saliva, discharge from nose or eyes, and feces secreted from infected birds. These materials can also contaminate surfaces (such as dirt or cages), food and water. These materials can also make birds sick.

How are birds tested for bird flu?

Live birds can be tested by your veterinarian. Dead birds can be tested by the San Diego County Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory.

What if I find a dead bird?

Call the Dead Bird Hotline at 1-888-551-INFO (4636).

What is the County of San Diego doing about bird flu?

The San Diego County Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory is testing all birds submitted to the laboratory for bird flu. The County Veterinarian has prepared a bird flu plan entitled “Avian Influenza Emergency Plan” in addition to working closely with human and animal health partners.

References

For general information about bird flu and pandemic flu go to www.sdbirdflu.org
For global information on bird flu, see the World Health Organization (WHO) Web site at www.who.int

Prepared by the Animal Disease and Diagnostic Laboratory,
Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures
sdcawm@sdcountv.ca.gov - www.sdcawm.org